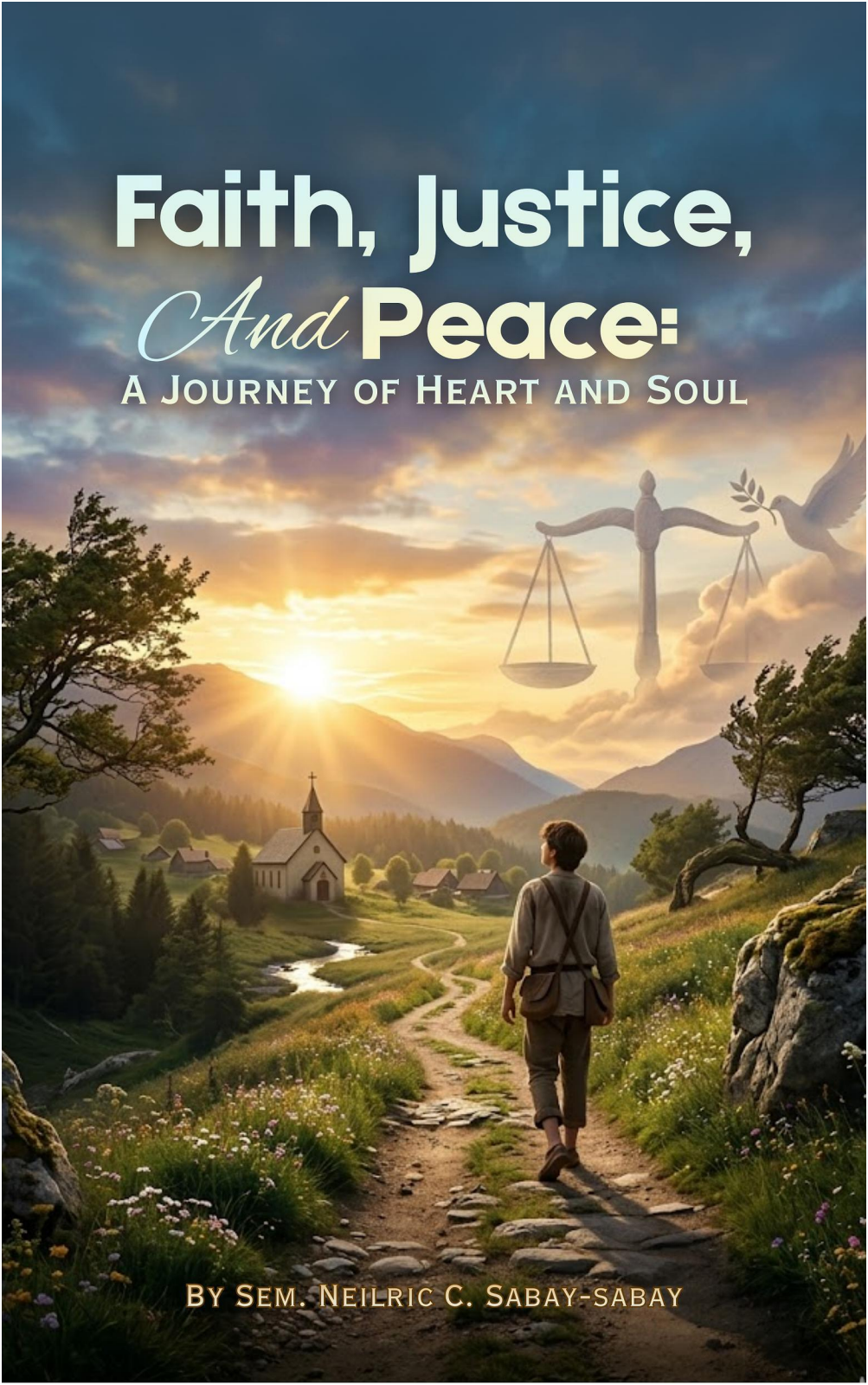
Faith, Justice, And Peace:

A Journey of Heart and Soul



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Faith, Justice, and Peace: A Journey of Heart and Soul

A Collection of Liturgical Readings and Reflections on Social Issues

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First edition

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I dedicate this book to the People of God, that we may all grow in faith, embody the love of Christ toward our neighbors, and become true peacemakers in a world seeking justice.

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Preface

This book is a collection of personal reflections that explore the deep connection between our daily lives and our spiritual journey. It looks at the difficult challenges we face in society, such as poverty, violence, and loss, and seeks to find meaning through the values of faith, justice, and compassion. The writings emphasize that we must move beyond simple service to become true peacemakers and intercessors who are conscious of our prayer lives and the world's needs. By remembering that our time on earth is temporary, we are encouraged to live with purpose, doing good and following the commands of love to prepare for eternal life. Ultimately, these reflections highlight the power of our words and hearts, urging us to turn away from anger and harsh judgments to instead embrace a path of transformation, listening, and harmony.

One

Chapter 1: Reflection on the Lumad and Our Community

The "Lumad" Indigenous Tribes of Bukidnon.

Bukidnon and the Lumad Tribes

The province of Bukidnon is a part of Northern Mindanao, which is the home to indigenous groups with 7 tribes such as Bukidnon, Higaonon, Talaandig, Manobo, Matigsalug, Tigwahanon, and Umayamnon and they are also called as "lumad". The province has also a christians like Catholics, Protestants, and there are also a Muslims. However, the

current problem in the province is that Lumad's has become suffering in poverty. Yet their culture still remains.

Poverty and Land Problems of the Lumad

Due to poverty, the Lumad's are seizing territories that do not belong to them because they no longer have a place to live. This is because their own territories were destroyed due to illegal logging, and also because other lands in Bukidnon were used to build various establishments. It is sad to think that these tribes no longer have much territory in the province, mainly because of the rise in population belonging to different religions.

Our Family's Experience

I remembered when the lumad's were seizing the lands of my relatives, particularly the territories of my grandparents. The sad thing is that my grandparents were unable to harvest the corn and sugarcane planted on that land. We also could not go near there because the tribes were already stationed in that area. It is difficult to disturb them because they have their own weapons, and there was even a moment when a shootout occurred.

God's Call to Help the Poor

However, I chose the responsorial psalm on November 12 last Wednesday. Psalm 82:3–4 teaches us to defend the weak, help the poor, and rescue those who are suffering. When I think about this verse, I remember the situation of the Lumad tribes in Bukidnon, particularly of the tribes who have been living in our area.

Pain on Both Sides

This experience showed me how painful and complicated the situation really is. My grandparents worked hard to plant corn and sugarcane, but they could not harvest anything because the Lumad tribe stayed on the land. We could not even visit the area because it was dangerous. There were weapons, and there was even a shootout. Even though my family suffered, I also saw that the Lumad suffered too because they were forced by poverty and loss.

A Lesson of Justice and Compassion

The Psalm 82 reminds me that God calls us to protect people who are weak and oppressed. It teaches me to look at both sides with compassion and to hope for justice, peace, and fair solutions for everyone in the community. It reminds us that even if we suffer for small things, in fact there are also people who suffer more than us due to poverty. As a grandchild, I see the Lumads as my brothers and sisters in Christ. Even if they are poor, we give them the opportunity to live in that area for the common good. I believe that we cannot bring our earthly treasures or wealth with us to heaven, they remain on earth.

Embodying the Love of Christ through Others

As following the steps of Christ, I also act to be like Him such as to love each other even if it is stranger, to care with them as my sisters and brothers in Christ. I also believed that Christ lives in each of us, and if we reject one another we also reject Christ.

Two

Chapter 2: The Youth: From Church Service to World Peacemakers

Moving Beyond Service to Spiritual Growth

Nowadays, most of the serious Church goers and attend daily masses are the old people or senior citizens. As I have observed, especially in our Diocese, all active youth from each Parishes has an active participation in terms of services like serving at the altar, or being part of youth ministry, and all these things are all focused on services. So that the youth must grow in accordance with their faith in the Lord and live a prayerful life.

Pope Leo meets the XVI XIV meets with the Pope"s Worldwide Prayer Network.

The Call to be Intercessors and Peacemakers

From the Vatican news last January 30, 2026, Pope Leo XIV recognized the youth of the Church. As he stated, *"Young people, be the next generation of intercessors for world's needs"*. This news reminds me that the youth of the Church has not merely a role of the world. However, I chose the liturgical reading last February 1, 2026 from the Gospel of Matthew 5:9 that says *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God"*. As I reflect this verse in relation to the Youth of the Church, we as the active youth of Christ are the beacon of hope for the world needs through our roles as intercessor. The youth is not just active in terms of services of the Church, but we must also be active in terms of prayer life. As young Christians, we the youth must be conscious and aware of our life as we offer ourselves in the Church to serve Christ, and we are not just an intercessor but we must also be a peacemaker of the world, because we are the future of the Catholic Church.

A Personal Journey Toward the Priesthood

Ultimately, as Youth of the Church, I am grateful for having this kind of life as I am forming myself to become a Pauline Priest. This formation helps me to be a future pastor of His Church, and be a peacemaker and intercessor of the world's needs. By the help of God, I persevere to follow His steps to be a model of His goodness through service.

Three

Chapter 3: Faith in the Face of Tragedy: A Reflection on Justice and Eternal Life

A 15-year-old girl was brutally killed and beheaded in Valencia City.

Seeking God's Justice in Times of Sorrow

The death of Jennifer Encarnacion is a current issue in the province of Bukidnon. She was a minor who was reported missing and was later found dead. The incident was brutal, as she was found lifeless with her neck slashed. The body was discovered after 12:00 noon on January 8, 2026, in a grassy area in Sitio Buco-Sinait, Barangay Banlag, Valencia City, Bukidnon. The victim was identified as Jennifer Encarnacion, a Grade 9 student at Buco-Sinait Integrated School. She was reported missing on Tuesday, and after two days of searching, she was found, but she was already dead without a head.

The Final Judge and the Mystery of Life's End

I chose the first reading last January 11 from Acts 10:42 "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead." Our life here on Earth is temporary, though we are created for a reason and purpose. Only God knows our time, like Jennifer, her time here is done even at his young age. Only God can judge her—and us, probably. Even Jennifer's family can't accept the situation but there is nothing they can do. They should accept it even if it hurts them.

Living with Purpose in a Temporary World

This situation reminds us that life is very valuable. Even in our imperfection, we commit sin but God is still merciful and ready to forgive us. He wants us to be with Him in paradise but to reach there we must follow Him, and the key to enter there is death. Even when we do not know when we will die, we must be prepared all the time. We make our moments here on this temporary world with good records to God, like doing good, following His commandments, and also the greatest commands such as love God and Love your neighbors. All these things are very important in order to prepare ourselves for judgement day.

Four

Chapter 4: Reflections on the Maramag Tragedy

Valuing Life and Preparing for God's Judgment

A video of a stabbing incident in the town of Maramag in the province of Bukidnon is currently trending on social media. A man who was repeatedly stabbed by another man has died. One person had already been stabbed, but then another man from another group suddenly appeared, and he was the one who was repeatedly stabbed until he lost his life. Before this incident happened, there was a group of people drinking that led to a fight, which escalated to the point where they started stabbing each other. Six of them were injured and one died.

Fear and Violence in Society

This news is popular today especially in the area of Bukidnon. However, I saw the comment of one netizen on the post from GMA news report, the comment from Archie Quiapo said *"Ngayong sabihin nyo aayosin nyo ang pilipinas???? Paanu nyo yan maiwasan ganyan bagay??? C Duterte lng nakakagawa nyan" dahil takot sila,,, Ngayon kabilaang patayan kahit saan nlng !! Wala ng takot pumatay mga tao mgayun kahot inosente!!!"* This comment made me think deeply, especially the words she said *"kabilaang patayan kahit saan nlng !!"*. Nowadays, some people are exposed to many vices. It is either drugs or alcohol that could harm them and cause crime. On the other hand, our country today has common crime records. While some citizens blamed the governments or those who are responsible to serve the country. Filipinos expecting *"bagong Pilipinas"* through the platforms of the leaders. But sad to say, the crimes are now happening everywhere in the country.

From Weapons of Greed to Tools of Harmony

However I chose the first reading last Sunday November 30 the first Sunday of advent, the reading taken from Isaiah 2:4 said *"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again."* This verse shows and reflects the sad reality of the crimes happening in the Philippines today. Even if we are not in a big war, but there is still violence, stealing, and hurting others in many communities. It is like the *"swords"* of greed and anger are still inside the people's hearts, particularly some Filipinos. To follow this message of peace, we need to change our actions, behaviors and even our society. We must stop choosing crime and instead use our strength to make our neighborhoods safe, do honest work, and be kind to our fellow Filipinos, so that everyone in the country can live in peace.

Five

Chapter 5: Words of Hope, Not Words of Hurt

Entering the Desert: The Meaning of the 40 Days

We as Catholics are now entering the season of Lent which is a 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and repentance observed by Christians to spiritually prepare for the celebration of Easter. On the other hand, during Lent, Christians remember that Jesus Christ suffered, was crucified, died on the cross, and was buried before rising again on Easter Sunday. As we welcome this season we have also do as what Jesus experience during His journey.

The Vatican released Pope Leo XIV's message for Lent Feb. 13. Titled, "Listening and Fasting: Lent as a Time of Conversion," the papal message asked Catholics to come together as a community to listen to the word of God and to the vulnerable.

The Pope's Call: Fasting from Words that Wound

However, I chose the news from the Vatican about *" Pope's Lenten message: Abstain from harsh words and rash judgment"*. As we start the Lent, Pope Leo XIV invites Catholics to open ourselves to listening, fasting, and community, urging us to abstain from words of hatred in order to make space for words of hope and peace. The Pope focuses on abstaining from harsh words and rash judgment. It means we have to avoid speech that hurts or offends others. Therefore, I chose the Gospel last February 11 from the Gospel of Mark 7:15 says *"Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them."*

Controlling the Heart and Tongue

As a seminarian, I often use harsh words if I don't control my emotions. Though, I claimed

that those words I was expressing defiled me. Yes I committed sin, I hurt others, but I already confess it to the priest. The Pope reminds me that I have to control myself, especially my emotion by abstaining from harsh words and rash judgment for others during this season of lent. Instead I have to do more reflection and mediation and focus on Jesus' Journey. However, this season of lent is the perfect time for me to change myself, to renew my attitude, and do more penance.

The Path to Transformation: Listening and Acting

We as Christians, in the midst of our being imperfection we should do more reflection especially for the season of lent. We have to listen to the words of God and make it into action. As Jesus says in the gospel that our words come from our heart defile us. Therefore, we should be careful of our words and be conscious of what we say to others.